

Screening the parent for alcohol and drug involvement

Alcohol and drug use often are under-recognized as a factor in child welfare cases. Most studies indicate that between one-third and two-thirds of substantiated child abuse and neglect reports involve substance abuse, and that nationally, at least 50% of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect involve parental substance abuse. Best practices dictate that child welfare workers should always ask parents and adult caretakers about their substance use to screen for alcohol and drug abuse. Substance abuse screening alone is never diagnostic, but screening can indicate whether a comprehensive assessment or evaluation is needed.

Screens should be brief and should include questions about unintended use and/or desire to end use, as well as some question regarding consequences of use or concerns about such consequences. One well-known screening tool available for child welfare worker use is the four-question CAGE.

Ask the CAGE questions (amended for drug use).

C – Have you ever felt the need to **cut** down on your drinking or drug use?

A – Have you ever felt **annoyed** by people criticizing your drinking or drug use?

G – Have you ever felt bad or **guilty** about your drinking or drug use?

E – Have you ever had a drink or used a drug first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover (**eyeopener**)?

Scoring: If the answer is “yes” to one or more questions, the parent should receive a formal alcohol and drug assessment. “Yes” to one or two questions may indicate alcohol and drug related problems. “Yes” to three or four questions may indicate alcohol or drug dependence.

The CAGE can be obtained through a number of Internet sites or by accessing the original American Journal of Psychiatry article—Mayfield, D., McLeod, G., Hall P. The CAGE questionnaire: validations of a new alcoholism screening instrument. *Am J Psychiatry* 1974; 131: 1121-1123.

These are quick screens that should be used in conjunction with other information and observations. Answering “no” to all questions on either the CAGE or the UNCOPE does not rule out the possibility of an alcohol or drug-related problem.

Who should be screened?

It may be obvious to a child welfare worker that all adults in the household should be screened. In addition, other individuals connected to the case also should be screened. Substance abuse is an intergenerational disease; other family members may have alcohol or drug involvement. For example, if a child is placed with relatives, the kinship care provider(s) should be screened for the child's safety. The child welfare worker should look for and screen a child's other non-parent caregivers and any nontraditional or extended "family" caregivers, including caregivers not formally identified as family members.

Ask the UNCOPE questions

U – Have you continued to **use** alcohol or drugs longer than you intended? Or, Have you spent more time drinking or using than you intended?

N – Have you ever **neglected** some of your usual responsibilities because of alcohol or drug use?

C – Have you ever wanted to stop using alcohol or drugs but couldn't? (**cut down**)

O – Has your family, a friend, or anyone else ever told you they **objected** to your alcohol or drug use?

P – Have you ever found yourself **preoccupied** with wanting to use alcohol or drugs? Or, Have you frequently found yourself thinking about a drink or getting high?

E – Have you ever used alcohol or drugs to relieve **emotional discomfort**, such as sadness, anger, or boredom?

Scoring: Two or more positive responses indicate possible abuse or dependence and need for further assessment.

The UNCOPE can be obtained from Evince Clinical Assessments at <http://www.evinceassessment.com>

Taken from Understanding Substance Abuse and Facilitating Recovery: A Guide for Child Welfare Workers From the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare pages 5-6